

Conservation Policy: Realistic Expectations from the Next Farm Bill

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Whose expectations?

- **Mainstream Agriculture (MA) pragmatists' vision:**
Continuation of present trends involving ever-larger farms, specialized crop production, and large-scale confined animal feeding more or less inevitable.
 - high levels of commodity production and exports are central goals
 - recognition of reality of more stringent environmental constraints

Or a different vision?

- **Sustainable Agriculture (SA) advocates' vision:** That continuation of present trends not necessarily inevitable if a broad range of public policies radically altered. Advocate greater emphases on:
 - economic viability of 'moderate-sized' family farms
 - broad range of environmental objectives
 - rural development

Farm bill conservation expectations of MA advocates

- Continuation of policies that compensate farmers for most costs of meeting environmental objectives (the ‘provider gets’ principle)
- Allow large scale livestock operations to receive cost-share
- Environmental policies that enable, rather than inhibit, intensive agriculture

MA advocates' expectations, cont.

- Continuation of generous price and income support (and risk reduction) policies as part of the *quid pro quo* for meeting 'baseline' environmental conditions
- Continued crop planting flexibility, with any 'supply control' to come from environmental set-asides (CRP)

Farm bill conservation (‘agri-environmental’) expectations of SA advocates

- Priority to moderate-sized farms, both as a ‘Jeffersonian’ end in itself and as a means of promoting environmental stewardship
- Emphasize ‘polluter pays’ principle for controlling negative externalities from large-scale livestock operations

SA advocates’ expectations, cont.

- Utilize stewardship payments to foster provision of positive environmental externalities and public goods
- Complete the ‘decoupling’ of income supports from commodity production decisions
- Shift substantial portions of public funds from price & income supports to stewardship programs (emphasizing ‘working lands’)

Realistic expectations:

MA

provisions

- Major price & income supports
- EQIP more friendly to large-scale farms than at present

SA

provisions

- Conservation Security Program
- Expansions in various conserv programs (e.g., WHIP, Farmland Protection)